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# Paul Laurence Who?

## Invisibility and Misrepresentation in Children's Literature and Language Arts Textbooks

By Mary Jackson Scroggins and Jane M. Gangi

This article is a call-and-response-type conversation between two women—educators, mothers, lovers of words—on the representation of books about children of color in literature and language arts textbooks for preservice teachers. Scroggins shares anecdotes on the experience and real-life effects of invisibility, misrepresentation, and underrepresentation; her comments are italicized. Gangi reviews select textbooks and booklists. Both comment on the state of multiculturalism in children's literature.

*I am a writer, and I am Black. These two statements are not freestanding, unrelated. I write, in part, because I am Black, having found, as a very young reader, too few real reflections of me and my experiences in literature. The Western literary canon, which extends to children's literature, defaults to Whiteness, leaving children of color with insufficient literary self-images and those who nurture their exposure to and love of literature with inadequate texts—in terms of quantity and often authenticity—to share.*

I am also a writer, and I am White. As a mother and a professor of children's literature, I want my children and my students who are, or soon will be, teachers in the K-12 schools to read an inclusive range of literature. I want students of all ethnicities to see themselves in books. This idea is not new. In 1965, Nancy Larrick, like the boy in *The Emperor's New Clothes*, pointed out the obvious that only she seemed to see: Children's books were "all-White."<sup>1</sup> In 2004, however, when I look at recommended book lists for children, it seems many still haven't heard Larrick's 39-year-old wake-up call.

Several years ago I phoned a school official in the town where I live to point out that there were no multicultural selections in the recommended summer reading lists. I hear this experience is not uncommon. Two recent surveys conducted by the National Education Association (NEA)—one in 1999 and the other in 2000—show that teachers' and children's top 100 favorite books are still, for the most part, all-white.<sup>2</sup> Yet authors and illustrators of color have been writing and illustrating for decades, and there are publishers—mostly small—who seek and publish quality multicultural literature. Why, more than 40 years after the civil rights movement, are books by and about African Americans, Latinos, American Indians, and Asian Americans still underrepresented in many of the nation's schools?

### **Invisibility, Misrepresentation, and Underachievement**

*My children and others of color are, if not invisible, nearly unrecognizable in children's literature. And misrepresentation is as*

*harmful—if not more so—to self-image and self-esteem as is invisibility. In the 1950s and early 1960s, never seeing a recognizable me left me feeling diminished in significance and disconnected from the broader world about which I read. Later, the disconnection and confusion shifted to anger. Seeing me occasionally, but with features unlike my own, sounding unlike me, and without another Black friend or acquaintance—being only and/or stereotypically transformed—left me feeling ashamed of the unreal me. And, although an academic discussion of multiculturalism and inclusiveness may have been ongoing for the past 39 years, that academic discussion has not translated into sufficiently richer, more inclusive literature.*

*Representation remains minimal except in the work of writers of color, and their work remains underrepresented in teachers' textbooks and student readers, rarely receives major children's literature awards, and is underappreciated as evidenced by lack of significant inclusion in lists of teachers' and children's top 100 books. Teachers can only share what they have been exposed to, and children can consider for excellence only those works they have read.*

*Following is an excerpt from my essay on an after-school writing program I established in a public school in Washington, D.C.:*

*My children at Merritt are wonderful. They are also at risk. I am afraid for them. Afraid that I will not make a significant difference in their lives. Afraid that not enough others will attempt to smooth their way. I am afraid that Louis, eight years old and cherubic, will never rid himself of that "black flower of death" thing that he writes about. That Sharon will not continue to love herself. She writes poignantly of loving herself today. That Les will forever feel that he is primitive and disliked and think that Black children carry a stench—the "smell of ghetto kids." That Bernard—who says he does not like guns, although they are sometimes cool—will let his desire to be cool override that dislike. I am afraid that David will one day stop singing to his mother just to make her happy. At*

eight, he is already embarrassed to admit that he does such an unmanly thing.

*The self-images, self-esteem, and achievement levels of these wonderful but poorly served Black children are, in part, developed through literary invisibility and misrepresentation. In the absence of teachers, writers, and parents who understand the need to smooth their way, Black flowers of death kill all the lovely, colorful blossoms in the garden; Black children come to believe they carry the stench of the ghetto and so are inherently unworthy/unequal. In the absence of culturally accurate, appropriate representation, what can we expect children to perceive about themselves, their value, and their likely achievement?*

The underachievement of children of color in comparison with their White counterparts is well documented. While the reasons for underachievement are complex—socioeconomic status, under- and unemployment, institutional racism, and so on—the focus here is on lack of curricular visibility, especially in the elementary grades, a time when children should feel welcomed, respected, and affirmed in their schools.

*Growing up Black and not affluent in Washington, D.C., with a mother determined to expand my life options, meant that my world was both broad and interminably narrow. (African American was not the term of choice during my childhood, so I will use Black throughout for consistency.) Everyone around me looked like me except corner grocery store owners and—I thought—insurance men. Insurance collectors in the 1950s and early 1960s who came to my neighborhood in Northeast Washington were always male and White. My whole world was pretty much Black, until I began to read. In books, the whole world was White. Meadows, green fields, prairies, majestic mountains, and white-sand beaches dominated the landscape. There seemed to be no room for my city blocks and no room for me. I am not sure when books became important to me, to my life, or when they began to broaden my world, to challenge and then to change my perception of it and perhaps of my place within it.*

Invisibility is only one part of the problem. Misrepresentation is another. American Indians, for example, are all too visible—in stereotypical and denigrating ways: “whooping,” “befeathered,” “leering,” and “attacking ‘peaceful’ settlers.” There are “too many books,” writes Mary Gloyne Byler, “in which white benevolence is the only thing that saves the day for the incompetent, childlike Indian.”<sup>3</sup> Asian Americans in children’s literature manifest another problem—that of remaining “forever foreign.” No matter how many generations their families have lived in the United States, others assume they have just arrived and will probably soon go back.<sup>4</sup>

While teachers cannot cure all of society’s ills (though they are often expected to), they—and other adults—must seek out what they did not learn in their own schooling. Kathleen Horning and Ginny Moore Kruse from the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin write that “a devastating lack of

information and insight about cultures (other than their own and the dominant culture) was provided to professionals.”<sup>5</sup>

To try to understand why multicultural literature is still underused, I examined the textbooks that teach the teachers. In several cases, the authors of these textbooks have made significant contributions to our understanding of reading and to the centrality of high-quality children’s literature in the reading process. In their next editions, however, they should make more effort to introduce quality multicultural literature and ethnic authors.

### Current Children’s Literature Textbooks

*I started to write stories and poems in about the second grade. I started writing early out of a love for words and reading, but I later realized that I had to write out of a need to see/hear me—in part, for my children/our children.*

**Literature and the Child, 5th ed. (2002) by Bernice Cullinan and Lee Galda.** Their chapter 11 on building a culturally diverse literature collection is excellent, and includes works by many cultural insiders (meaning those who share the culture about which they write). The endpapers contain a commendable “Touchstones in the History of Children’s Literature.” Looking at the years between 1960 and 2000, of the approximately 70 “touchstone” books, 30 are by or about people of color. However, the “Milestones in Literature for Children and Young Adults: Beatrix Potter to Harry Potter” is far less multicultural than the “Touchstones.” From 1895 to, most recently, J. K. Rowling, there are but two authors of color, Virginia Hamilton and James Berry. Other major authors of color who should be included are the Newbery-winning author Mildred Taylor, who has been writing since the 1970s, and Ann Petry, whose 1955 biography of Harriet Tubman is still, I think, the best biography on Tubman available. Other “milestone” authors omitted—Bette Bao Lord, Laurence Yep, Mitsumasa Anno, and Julius Lester—have all had successful careers in children’s literature spanning several decades. Joseph Bruchac, who won the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers Circle of the Americas, should most certainly have been included in this list.

*Cultural outsiders (those who do not share the culture about which they write) can write competently outside of their culture; however, there is an obligation for outsiders (I do not like the term) to be particularly diligent in research, presentation, and citation. The same should be said of cultural insiders (those who share the culture about which they write). Perhaps, the greatest difference, however, comes in the population- and culture-relevant life experience that the insider brings and the telling anecdotes, which often do not exist for the outsider. The power of words is often in the nuances of their use. Outsiders must work harder to get the nuances right. Those nuances might simply be details of life and experience for the insider or particular phrases or ways of interacting. Outsiders are notorious for not getting speech patterns right and for perpetuating stereotypical phrasing that the group in question does not recognize as its own. Yet being an insider does not necessarily mean the work will honor or accurately represent the*

shared culture.

Despite the advantage one might logically think insiders would have in presenting their authentic stories, the widespread perception is that outsiders—most often White writers writing about people of color—have an easier time getting published and are more likely to have their work shared inside and outside the classroom and recognized or cited in texts on children's literature.

In another section, "One Hundred Books That Shaped the Century," the authors invite "four book librarian experts" to reach a consensus on the top 100 books of the twentieth century. This list includes seven authors of color: Donald Crews, Virginia Hamilton, Patricia McKissack, Walter Dean Myers, John Steptoe, Mildred Taylor, and Ed Young—six African-American authors and one Chinese-American author. Authors from other ethnic groups who could be included are Naomi Shihab Nye, with her books on the Middle East, Mexican-American George Ancona, Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki/Slovak), Pura Belpré and Nicholasa Mohr (Puerto Rican), Laurence Yep (Chinese American), Sheila Hamanaka and Yoshiko Uchida (both Japanese American), and José Aruego (Filipino).

Chapter Two, "Poetry and Verse," contains 13 profiles of individual poets. Only one, Eloise Greenfield, is of color. Others who should be profiled include Langston Hughes, Shonto Begay, Pat Mora, Francisco Alarcón, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Nikki Giovanni, Janet S. Wong, Pat Cummings, and Nikki Grimes. In fact, of the 24 profiles contained throughout the book, only two besides Greenfield are of color—Mildred Taylor and the Pinkney family.

Chapter 5, on folklore, misses the opportunity to introduce readers to "cultural insiders." Of the nine recommended American Indian books, *none are by American Indians*. Yet Joseph Bruchac has been publishing traditional Native stories for decades. There are many other native retellers, including Gayle Ross (Cherokee), C. J. Taylor (Mohawk), and Michael Lacapa (Apache/Hopi/Tewa). Of the 12 recommended African stories, *only two retellers are of African descent*—all the rest are White—and several of the stories do not cite their sources. Respect and responsibility require that retellers cite their sources, especially when retelling stories outside their own culture. Betsy Hearne sets the standard for citing sources: In addition to citing the source, the model source note "adds a description for cultural context, and describes what the author has done to change the tale, with some explanation of why."<sup>6</sup>

*I earned a Master of Arts degree in Writing with a concentration in Fiction from Johns Hopkins University. The program was excellent, and program participants were writers (some published, some not then), lovers of words, and well read. In the late 1990s in an American Literature course with an accomplished, well-published poet as the professor, students were asked about their favorite writers. I gave Paul Laurence Dunbar as one of my favorites and found that not one other student—of about 15 present—had ever heard of Dunbar. He was one of America's most talented poets, and he was also Black. Apparently, his Blackness superseded his talent; that is, the fact of his race, his being "other"*

*made reading and appreciation of his work unnecessary even for a group of intelligent well-read writers—future purveyors of literary images and perhaps future teachers. If I had indicated that I had never heard of Emily Dickinson or Robert Frost, I would have been thought poorly read, probably unintelligent, and certainly wanting educationally.*

**Children's Literature, Briefly, 3rd ed. (2004) by James S. Jacobs and Michael O. Tunnell.** In an excellent opening chapter on the importance of engaged reading, the titles mentioned are solely by White authors. The authors lose the opportunity in their first chapter, which sets the stage for the rest of the book, to show that children can become just as "lost in a book" by Virginia Hamilton or Joseph Bruchac as they can in a book by Jerry Spinelli or Gary Paulsen. They lose the same opportunity in Chapter 2 on "What Is a Good Book?," continuing to refer to White authors Spinelli (again) and Paulsen (again). In Chapter 3, "What Is a Good Book? The Words," there are still no authors of color, but Spinelli makes a third appearance. Chapter 4, on illustrations, mentions three illustrators of color—Mitsumasa Anno, Jerome Lagarrigue, and Brian Pinkney—out of approximately 50 books. In Chapter 5, a "History and Trends" chart of touchstone books from 1440 to 2001—a span of over 500 years—features but two authors of color, Yoshiko Uchida and Virginia Hamilton.

Jacobs and Tunnell structure the bibliographies for the various genres by listing "Ten of Our Favorites," then "Others We Like." The ten favorites for folklore improve over their second edition by including four authors of color instead of two. For modern fantasy, there are no authors of color in either category, and they include *The Indian in the Cupboard*, a questionable choice that I will discuss. In Jacobs and Tunnell's defense, there are not many authors of color who write fantasy, probably because in the postcolonial era there have been other more pressing contemporary and historical issues for writers of color to address first, but that is changing. Several of Gary Soto's novels and Joseph Bruchac's *The Skeleton Man* (2001) are examples.

Jacobs and Tunnell's ten favorites in the genre of contemporary realism include Spinelli, of course, but no authors of color, nor are there any in the supplemental list. In historical fiction, two of their ten favorites are by Mildred Taylor and Yoko Kawashima Watkins; others they like, with more multicultural offerings, are an improvement over their second edition. In Biography, the inclusion of Ji Li Jiang is an improvement over the second edition, which suggested no authors of color. Two multicultural authors make the Picture Book list, but none for Informational Books and Poetry. When Dunbar and other poets of color receive so little attention in the textbooks that introduce poetry to those who work most with children, Mary's story from Johns Hopkins begins to make sense.

*My goals are twofold in writing for children—to present accurate portrayals that honor the child and his or her culture and to fill the gap. In the late 1970s and 1980s, my daughters and I took turns in the evening reading pages or chapters of select books. We read a disproportionate number of biographies and nonfiction—*

often found in texts on African-American history—because there were so few works of fiction widely available that centered on or authentically included children of color. Of course, we read Eloise Greenfield, Virginia Hamilton, Sharon Bell Mathis, Patricia and Frederick McKissack, Mildred Taylor, and the like, but we had to search far and wide to find sufficient culturally respectful and accurate reading material. *African Dream* by Greenfield—a Kwanzaa gift—remains one of my daughters' favorite books.

During one of our periods of joint reading, we read parts of the *Little House* series by Laura Ingalls Wilder (mindfully discussing insensitivities and the concept of historical context). We enjoyed the continuing story that chronicled the life of children during an important period of American history, and I decided then to try to write a series of historically sound stories for children that chronicles another important period from the perspective of a 10-year-old slave. I call the initial story *My Name Is Malindy*.

Writing is one thing. Getting the story published by a mainstream press is another. Like many other writers of color writing about people like us, I saw my work rejected because of its presumed lack of universal appeal and message.

### Children's Literature Texts with a Special Focus

In addition to standard children's literature texts, in 2003 two new themed books were published—one on literature for mobile children and one relating principles and concepts of children's literature to the Outward Bound program. While the angles in these two books are interesting and fresh, there are some serious flaws in their treatment of multicultural literature.

***New Kid in School: Using Literature to Help Children in Transition* (2003) by Debra Rader and Linda Harris Sittig.** As someone who moved five times during 12 years of public schooling, I have a personal appreciation for the authors' efforts to address this overlooked population, who are often forced to "sink or swim." To my knowledge, Rader and Sittig's book is the first to focus solely on this group.

Rader is a teacher in London, and Sittig teaches elementary school in Virginia as well as at Shenandoah University. Given the book's promise and the authors' international credentials, I was eager to learn of new multicultural and international literature titles. I found, instead, an overreliance on authors of European descent. With the exception of Bette Bao Lord, Allen Say, and Janet Wong (all Asian American), "cultural insiders" were noticeably absent. Going that extra step—seeking out authors and illustrators of color—is crucial in educating mobile children of color (who are, after all, 70 percent of the world's children). They must see themselves in books, and they must have access to professional mentors, such as authors and illustrators of children's books.

Transition themes can be found in many books by authors of color, far more than the few mentioned by Rader and Sittig. Both by Christopher Paul Curtis, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963* (which was a Newbery and Coretta Scott King Honor Book) and *Bud, Not Buddy* (which was the Award winner for both) depict African Americans leaving home for

parts unknown. For young adults, there is Jacqueline Woodson's *Hush*, a novel about a family that must, because of the father's testimony against the police in the killing of a teenager, assume new identities and move from their beloved state. Joseph Bruchac's *Eagle Song* tells the story of Danny, a Mohawk boy who moves from a reservation to Brooklyn and endures teasing and loneliness. Pam Muñoz Ryan in *Esperanza Rising* recounts the story, based on her grandmother's experience, of a wealthy and pampered girl who, after her father's violent death, must leave Mexico for the migrant camps of California. *Habibi* by Naomi Shihab Nye depicts an adolescent girl whose family leaves St. Louis to live in between Jerusalem and the Palestinian village where her father grew up. These are a few of the novels with transitional themes by and about people of color, too often a neglected group in the world of children's literature textbooks.

For picture books, Rader and Sittig's choice of *Painted Words and Spoken Memories* by Alike is an excellent one on immigration because of the quality of the narrative and the illustrations. While Alike, Patricia Polacco, and Eve Bunting are indeed fine writers, they should not be used to the exclusion of authors and illustrators not of European descent. Picture books with immigration and transition themes by authors and illustrators of varying ethnicities are *My Freedom Trip* by Frances and Ginger Park, which tells of the authors' escape from North Korea, and Pat Mora's *Tomás and the Library Lady*, illustrated by Raul Colón, which describes the friendship that develops between the son of migrant workers (the future author Tomás Rivera) and a librarian. Because the boy does not have a permanent address and, therefore, cannot apply for a library card, the librarian lends him her card. *Dia's Story Cloth: The Hmong People's Journey of Freedom*, by Dia Cha and stitched by Chue and Nhia Thao Cha, tells of the emigration from Laos to the United States. Picture books like these should be included in *New Kid in School*, as should more by international authors and illustrators.

The appendices include a chart of cross-referenced literature and transition links and children's literature resources. Web sources to multicultural awards such as the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award, the Coretta Scott King Awards, and the Pura Belpré Award, and multicultural web sites such as Oyate, which evaluates literature for American Indians, would be helpful here.

***Literacy and Learning: An Expeditionary Discovery through Children's Literature* (2003) by Suzanne W. Hawley and Carolyn V. Spillman.** The authors ground their thematic approach in the admirable principles of Outward Bound: self-discovery, service and compassion, imagination, empathy and caring, dealing with success and failure, collaboration and competition, diversity and inclusivity, stewardship of the natural world, and solitude and reflection. Hawley has a background in library science, and Spillman is a professor of education at Florida Gulf Coast University; the marriage of the two backgrounds results in a rich synthesis of approaches to literature.

Of dozens of titles in Chapter 1, on infancy and toddlerhood, Donald Crews and Sandra Pinkney are the only

authors and illustrators of color mentioned; surely, children of color should see themselves in books at the very beginning of their lives and not have to wait until they get to school.

Chapter 2 is somewhat more inclusive. Of recommended poetry for developing phonemic awareness one could add Grace Hallworth's *Down by the River: Afro-Caribbean Rhymes, Games, and Songs for Children*; José-Luis Orozco's *Diez Deditos/Ten Little Fingers and Other Play Rhymes and Action Songs from Latin America*, illustrated by Elisa Kleven; Tish Hinojosa's *Cada Niño/Every Child: A Bilingual Songbook for Kids*, illustrated by Lucia Angela Perez; and Javaka Steptoe's *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers*. Many worry that, in pursuing equity and justice, we may lose our focus on quality and universality, but these books meet as high a standard as that of the White poets included.

*An insidious issue related to the marginalization of authors of color and their work is this concept of universality. The presumption is that works by those of us considered "other" have little relevance and appeal beyond our own communities.*

*My first Malindy book—a work in progress—is a story of a child's interaction with and attempt to understand her environment. An excerpt from the Prologue follows:*

*This book tells a little of Malindy's story. She was quite an ordinary child—much perhaps like you and your friends—except that she lived under an inhumane system called slavery, and she was a slave.*

*As her story is told here, it lacks much of the brutality and cruelty that were a part of her life and her time. It contains few of the unkind and demeaning names and little of the abusive language that she and other slaves endured regularly. She would not wish to assault your ears as hers were so often assaulted. But she would want to have her story told. It is a part of our collective American history—a distinctive patch in the quilt that is America...*

*As you read, listen to its melody, and let it take you back to Bracton Plantation in Lee County, South Carolina. The year is 1850.*

*The standard for determining universality and likely readership applied to Malindy's story—or that of others of color—should be the same as that applied to Laura Ingalls Wilder's. Accuracy of presentation, sensitivity and attention to culture and details, historical accuracy, authenticity, applicability of concepts and experiences to understanding one's world and that of others, and quality of writing are important factors by which literature should be evaluated and included or excluded.*

*Disparate standards, which affect publication, availability, and reading recommendations and assignments, require children of color to have double reading duty (as do adults of color); that is, to be well read, they must read both standard reading list, so-called universal texts (majority-culture-based and -centered) and culture-specific texts (often insider written) that authentically include them and their experiences. The other option for many*

*children of color and their White counterparts is to choose between the two. Most will choose standard reading list selections; academically, they will not be judged negatively for having done so.*

Also in Chapter 2, the authors clearly explain the difference between emergent and transitional readers; again, their lists of books could be more inclusive. Dr. Seuss, Arnold Lobel, and Mem Fox are indeed wonderful authors for emergent readers, as are Peggy Parish and Suzy Kline for transitional readers; to that list, Sharon Draper's *Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs* could be added. However, the Chapter 2 and 3 booklists for self-discovery (independent and supplemental reading) include *Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys* by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard, illustrated by E. B. Lewis (who is, in my opinion, one of the most gifted watercolorists working today), and books by Laurence Yep, Walter Dean Myers, Christopher Paul Curtis, and Gary Soto.

The authors write, "Children quickly lose their innocence in our society.... We can no longer protect our children from seeing real-world events" (p. 43). However, just as we overemphasize White authors for touchstone quality books, we also overuse White psychologists and child development experts for advice. Consider Marguerite Wright, an African-American psychologist: "I believe that instead of telling their children how tough life will be for them, truly caring parents and other adults should shield them from this information for as long as possible."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Debbie Reese (Nambé) does not recommend sharing deeply disturbing books with young children. Instead, she advises focusing "on providing information about contemporary Native children, presenting the traditional Native aspects of their lives, as well as the daily activities typical of other children in the United States (riding bikes...)." <sup>8</sup>

The authors turn to folklore for examples of service and compassion in Chapter 4. They do recommend multicultural sources for myth; however, the authors they choose as sources for Native American myth—John Bierhorst, Paul Goble, and Gerald McDermott—are not Native American. Bierhorst is described as "indefatigable"; so, too, might Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki) be described. Other Native retellers of myth include C. J. Taylor (Mohawk) and Victor Montejo (Mayan). Recommended legends and epics are European; Lynette Dyer Vuong's *Sky Legends of Vietnam* or Jeanne Li's *Legend of Li River* are examples of non-Western legends that could have been included. Bruchac has retold an epic from the Lenapes, *The Walum Olum*. The tall tale section is also all white; see *John Henry* by Julius Lester for an inclusive selection. The recommended fables section is more diverse, including Aesop, LaFontaine, and the Jatakas from Asia.

Examples of the folktale, with its subcategories, are also more multicultural, though Julius Lester's retellings of Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus* tales could be highlighted. The fairy tale examples are all European. Nothing wrong with the brothers Grimm, of course, but this section could include such fairy tales as Grace Tseng's *White Tiger, Blue Serpent* from China, Madhur Jaffrey's *Seasons of Splendor* from India, and Jewell Reinhart Coburn and Tzexa Cherta Lee's *Jouanah: A*

*Hmong Cinderella*. Postmodern folktale parodies could include *Leola and the Honeybears: An African American Retelling of Goldilocks and the Three Bears* by Melodye Rosales. The Class Projects section suggests finding out about early European compilers of folklore; to that list could be added Montejó and others who have collected non-Western literature.

The authors link the Outward Bound concept of developing the imagination with the fantasy genre, which makes sense. As in the Jacobs and Tunnell book, the choice of *The Indian in the Cupboard* raises concern.

Empathy and caring are linked to realistic fiction. The recommended authors—including Katherine Paterson, Betsy Byars, Judy Blume, Barbara Park, Marion Dane Bauer, Lois Lowry, and Jerry Spinelli—are all excellent choices. Reading books by these literary luminaries will help readers recognize quality; however, including authors of color—for example, Virginia Hamilton, Eloise Greenfield, Nicholasa Mohr, Candy Dawson Boyd, Cynthia Leitich Smith, Gary Soto, and Walter Dean Myers—would also help readers recognize quality. In the historical fiction section, to the authors' credit, they offer help to teachers who use the Laura Ingalls Wilder books: "When teachers discuss some of these historical fiction works with their students, they need to talk about the fact that attitudes and circumstances of the times dictate the way the stories are written. In many passages of fiction about early America, Native Americans are portrayed as needlessly cruel, as brutal savages" (p. 90). One could only wish the authors had gone a step further and included cultural insiders in the books they profile. Left out are authors of historical fiction hugely significant to children's literature, such as the Newbery Award-winning Mildred Taylor; the prolific husband and wife team of Patricia and Fredrick McKissack; Joseph Bruchac (*The Winter People* [2002], which takes place during the French Indian War, is one of his best books); Ann Petry (now deceased, but who published for decades); and Pam Muñoz Ryan.

In the remainder of the book, successes and failures are linked to biography; collaboration and competition with picture books; diversity and inclusivity with multicultural literature; stewardship of the natural world with informational literature; and replenishing energy with poetry. The chapter on diversity is excellent, including recommended titles for various ethnic groups, multicultural awards, and books grouped around themes such as racism. Cross-cultural relationships are considered. However, literature by writers of color should not be automatically grouped in a special multicultural chapter for the purpose of emphasizing tolerance.

Taking care of oneself, the subject of Chapter 11, is a welcome feature of this book. Primarily, this chapter focuses on poetry, though other genres are brought in as well. Although the authors do include Bruchac's *Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back*, they should include other American Indian poets and retellers in lieu of White poets and retellers who appropriate Native stories.

"The Literature Program in the Curriculum" (Chapter 12) is a timely addition to the book in this day and age when, mandated by ill-informed legislatures, phonics threatens to

take over. Phonics is part—but not all—of literacy instruction, which the authors make clear in their lucid discussion of the reading process. In a list of "authors whose work is excellent and whose books will provide many opportunities for integrating social studies and science with language arts and reading" (p. 214), I wish Mildred Taylor were not the only author of color included. A major project in the social studies is to give curricular space to marginalized voices, and there have been so many excellent authors of color writing literature that connects to the social studies.

The appendices include listings of the Newbery, Caldecott, Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpré, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and Mildred Batchelder awards. These will be helpful to teachers and are culturally inclusive. The authors deserve credit for the way they integrate the demands of the curriculum with the expeditionary themes of *Outward Bound*.

### Negative Images

*My children and yours have the advantage of parents who understand the importance of ongoing exposure to authentic voices and stories from multiple cultures. Even so, my children and yours are as poorly served as all other children in that they do not have the classroom affirmation—deliberate and unwavering—of the experiences, contributions, and worth of others like and unlike them. They will not receive this affirmation in nurturing, protective classrooms unless teachers broaden their exposure and thinking.*

*And we must remember that many, if not most, children do not have even the at-home advantage that our children have. Both parents of color and White parents have had experiences similar to those of their children within the world of children's literature and the arts.*

*In the absence of positive, balanced, culturally accurate representations, children are often left with negative representations—inaccurate and/or biased images or nonexistent images. When people and their cultures are considered not worthy of mention, children create and internalize their own images, often filling the void with negative or at least inaccurate ones by default.*

Another facet to consider is the quality of so-called multicultural books. Some of the books recommended by both children's literature and reading and language arts textbooks are questionable. It is debatable whether all of the following books should be retired; however, if used with children, the cultural issues should at least be discussed.

**Arrow to the Sun by Gerald McDermott** (recommended by Cullinan and Galda; Jacobs and Tunnell; Hawley and Spillman). While McDermott has had a long and brilliant career as a writer, reteller, and illustrator, there are American Indians who question his—and other White retellers—making his fortune through other people's stories. This is not to say "cultural outsiders" cannot write about cultures not their own, but if they do, they must learn all they can about the culture. *Arrow to the Sun* is based on a Pueblo tale; Lawrence Sipe tells us that Pueblo Indians believe McDermott has misrepresented their culture in this book.<sup>9</sup>



**Brother Eagle, Sister Sky** by Susan Jeffers (recommended by Cullinan and Galda). Well-intentioned teachers often think they are simultaneously choosing both environmental and multicultural literature when they select this stunningly illustrated book. However, as John Stott points out, Jeffers has permuted a Squamish leader from the Northwest into a Plains Indian and sanitized Chief Seathl's original speech, which "despaired of the survival of his people."<sup>10</sup> The concept of "sister sky" is unknown to American Indians, and the book promotes a stereotype: that of the noble, disappearing Indian.

**The Five Chinese Brothers** by Claire Bishop (recommended by Cullinan and Galda). Bishop's retelling of *The Five Chinese Brothers* reinforces stereotypes of Asian Pacific Americans and, given more recent publications, is outdated. Elaine Aoki comments, "Standards for Asian Pacific American literature have been established by authors such as José Aruego, Yoshiko Uchida, and Laurence Yep. Why then do we continue to use *The Five Chinese Brothers*?"<sup>11</sup> Kurt Wiese's illustrations in *The Story about Ping* by Marjorie Flack (recommended by Cullinan and Galda) are also stereotypical.

**The Indian in the Cupboard** by Lynne Reid Banks (recommended by Tunnell and Jacobs; Hawley and Spillman). Banks's book, and its sequels, though bestsellers and popular movies, are highly offensive to American Indians. The books are not culturally specific: Little Bear is supposedly an Iroquois, yet is dressed as a Plains Indian. Banks's characterization and dialogue are demeaning. She has Little Bear say such things as, "Good sleep happen. Cold ground. Need blanket. Food. Fire."<sup>12</sup> Calling this style of speech "early jawbreaker," Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale remark, "Nobody in the history of the world ever spoke this way." In *Return of the Indian*, Indians are pictured as brutal and mindlessly cruel: "Not any amount of fine writing," say Slapin and Seale, "excuses such abuse of the child audience."<sup>13</sup> Donnarae MacCann criticizes Banks of entertaining contemporary White children with a character who vacillates between the childish and the violently aggressive, blaming American Indians for what anyone else in their situation would have done—defending their own lands.<sup>14</sup>

In the absence of respectful images with which children can identify, so much is left to chance—to the good or bad fortune of socioeconomic, family education levels, and understanding of the importance of children seeing themselves in literature and to individual teacher commitment.

When my daughters were very young, they colored every person of importance—real and imaginary—Black (actually, brown, usually dark brown) because that was their frame of reference. They brought home Black pictures of Susan B. Anthony, George Washington, and Santa Claus. Prior to their presenting such artwork, their father and I had never discussed race with them relative to these figures. But in part because my daughters had positive self-images, these and other important figures were Black to them in the absence of information otherwise. (Of course, we always corrected them on misrepresentations of actual people; however, I admit we were quite pleased that our daughters did not

think their Christmas good fortune resulted from the benevolence of a chunky White stranger with breaking-and-entering tendencies, no matter how pleasant he seemed in print and at the mall.)

**Knots on a Counting Rope** by Bill Martin and John Archambault (recommended by Cullinan and Galda). As with the Jeffers book, teachers think they are choosing a multicultural book with this title. Slapin and Seale call it "repulsive, in its deliberate pandering to the romantic mythology about 'Indians' in the minds of a certain kind of white adult purchaser."<sup>15</sup> Although the story appears to take place within the Navajo, or Diné, culture, it is neither culturally specific nor authentic. Indian children do not, like the blind boy in the story, interrupt their elders during storytelling, and unlike the grandfather in this tale, grandparents patiently repeat their stories when children request them. The counting rope is itself deceptive; no such artifact exists within the Navajo culture.

**The Sign of the Beaver** by Elizabeth George Speare (recommended by Cullinan and Galda). Like Laura Ingalls Wilder, Speare is undoubtedly a gifted writer. However, her *Sign of the Beaver* reinforces the idea of the "disappearing Indian." There are many alternatives to this old chestnut in classrooms: Louise Erdrich's *The Birchbark House* (1999) and Bruchac's *The Arrow over the Door* (1998). If George's book is used, the stereotypes should be discussed.

**Amazing Grace** by Mary Hoffman. This book is almost unanimously recommended by experts: A Black girl, Grace, defies the odds by playing a traditionally White boy's role in the play *Peter Pan*. However, African-American Children's Literature professor Violet J. Harris stopped using the book because she thought the book celebrates one culture at the expense of American Indians; there is one page where Grace imitates stereotypical "Indian" behavior. If the book is used, this aspect should be discussed.<sup>16</sup>

### Final Thoughts—A Shared Conclusion

To reflect the multicultural nature of our country and the world and to honor the heritage and culture of all children, we must expose current and future teachers to children's literature that is culturally accurate and inclusive. Malindy's story is indeed a part of our collective history, and all our children need and have the absolute right to feel pride as they read about her maneuvering a monstrous system and a very difficult life. Children need to see the world through the eyes of children like and unlike them and to understand the past and conjure up a future based, in part, on literary accounts from broad perspectives of people, time, and space.

The first chapter of *My Name Is Malindy* ends with Malindy sitting on the steps of her cabin looking across the plantation:

Malindy's world did not extend to all of South Carolina. Her world was Bracton Plantation. She had never even considered going off of Bracton land. There was no real point in considering a thing that Bracton slaves knew from birth was not possible. Still, every so often, just in case a slave plain lost his or her whole mind and thought to wander



off, Master Bracton would relate in the pleasantest possible way what had happened to some "clearly willful, ungrateful, and disobedient slave"—like old Four-Finger Fred—who left Bracton Plantation unescorted or without proper passes.

Suddenly, Malindy thought of her almost-memory Mama, her real Mama, wandering off...and never coming back, not even for her.

Current children's literature should include varied voices and perspectives, including those shared through historical and other fiction—from insider perspectives when possible. When it does, children of color are on more even footing with their White counterparts relative to reading strategies—steps and parts of the process of enriched, meaningful reading. My children benefited from reading that engaged them because it connected to and honored them without stereotyping and doing dishonor to others. The task of finding such literature was more difficult when they were young than it is today, as educators and writers move the discussion of multiculturalism and inclusiveness beyond academia.

Most candidates preparing to teach in elementary schools are required to take a minimum of three credits in Reading and Language Arts. Questions about how to teach reading have been and continue to be highly controversial. However, based on extensive research of what good readers do, there is a strong consensus on what kinds of opportunities teachers must provide to help struggling readers.

If, when choosing literature to teach the various components of reading, teachers leave out multicultural offerings, children of color will not have as many opportunities as White children to develop essential reading strategies. Teaching and learning occur within a context: They depend on who shows up. Imagine a class of 25 children of European, Mexican, and Cambodian descent. Imagine another class of children of Puerto Rican, Chinese, and Polish descent. Always with an eye toward extending children's boundaries, teachers choose books based on the backgrounds of the children in the class, thus ensuring that each one can activate her or his prior knowledge. For teachers, each year will be different.

Our ability to enhance reading and learning experiences for all children and to represent, honor, and thus motivate all depends, in part, on our willingness to examine honestly the disconnection between the rhetoric around multiculturalism and the facts and then to broaden/change the existing canon. These are not such difficult tasks for people who put children first. An essential step in this process is for current and future teachers to read more widely and with great discrimination (with an ear and an eye to culturally competent and inclusive writing and presentation) and then to share the very best with their students.

The "mainstreaming" of children's literature by and about people of color is progressing unacceptably slowly. All children do not yet see themselves authentically and respectfully in children's literature. Academic discussions of literary invisibility, misrepresentation, and underrepresentation must logically be balanced with action that enriches children's experiences in and out of school. We started this discussion to examine these questions both anecdotally and

academically and to examine the current state of multiculturalism in textbooks that teach children's literature. We invite others to join the conversation.

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Africa Access: <http://filemaker.mcps.k12.md.us/aad>

American Indians:

Native Child: [www.nativechild.com/resources.html](http://www.nativechild.com/resources.html)

Oyate: [www.oyate.org](http://www.oyate.org)

University of Pittsburgh (Lisa Mitten's page): [www.pitt.edu/~lmitten/ailabib.htm](http://www.pitt.edu/~lmitten/ailabib.htm)

Anti-Defamation League: [www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org)

Disabilities: [www.kidsource.com/NICHCY/literature.html](http://www.kidsource.com/NICHCY/literature.html)

Gaulladet (hearing impaired): [www.aslp.gallaudet.edu](http://www.aslp.gallaudet.edu)

International books: [www.willesdenbookshop.co.uk](http://www.willesdenbookshop.co.uk)

Japanese Americans Citizens League: [www.jacl.org](http://www.jacl.org)

Kids Cultural Books: [www.blackbooksgalore.com](http://www.blackbooksgalore.com)

Latino bibliography:

[www.latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/Latino\\_Bibliography.html](http://www.latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/Latino_Bibliography.html)

Notable Books for a Global Society, International Reading

Association's Children's Literature Special Interest Group: [www.csulb.edu/org/childrens-lit/proj/nbgs.html](http://www.csulb.edu/org/childrens-lit/proj/nbgs.html)

Pacific Children's Literature Web Site:

[www.uog.edu/cor/paclit/index.htm](http://www.uog.edu/cor/paclit/index.htm)

University of Wisconsin, Cooperative Children Book Center: [www.soemadison.wisc.edu/ccbc](http://www.soemadison.wisc.edu/ccbc)

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Larrick, "The All-White World of Children's Books," *Saturday Review* (11 September 1965): 63-65, 84-85.

<sup>2</sup> "NEA Spotlights 100 Books to Grow On," *Reading Today: The Bimonthly Newspaper of the International Reading Association* (April/May 1999): 10; and, "NEA Poll Spotlights Kids' Favorite Books," *Reading Today: The Bimonthly Newspaper of the International Reading Association* (April/May 2000): 14.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Gloyne Byler, "Taking Another Look." In *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children*, Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale, eds. (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1992), p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Sandra S. Yamate, "Asian Pacific American Children's Literature: Expanding Perceptions About Who Americans Are." In *Using Multiethnic Literature in the K-8 Classroom*, Violet J. Harris, ed. (Norwood, Mass.: Christopher-Gordon, 1997), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen T. Horning and Ginny Moore Kruse, "Looking into the Mirror: Considerations Behind the Reflections." In *The Multicolored Mirror: Cultural Substance in Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Merri V. Lindgren, ed. (Fort Atkinson, Wis.: Highsmith, 1991), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Betsy Hearne, "Cite the Source: Reducing Cultural Chaos in Picture Books, Part One," *School Library Journal* (July 1993): 22.

<sup>7</sup> Marguerite A. Wright, *I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Debbie Reese, "Native Americans in Children's Literature," *Using Multiethnic Literature in the K-8 Classroom* (Norwood, Mass.: Christopher-Gordon, 1997), p. 164.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence R. Sipe (citing Smolkin & Suina), "Children's Response to Literature: Author, Text, Reader, Context," *Theory into Practice*, 38.3 (1999): 121.

<sup>10</sup> John Stott, *Native Americans in Children's Literature* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryx, 1995), pp. 18-22.

<sup>11</sup> Elaine Aoki, "Turning the Page: Asian Pacific American Children's Literature," *Teaching Multicultural Literature in Grades K-8*, Violet J. Harris, ed. (Norwood, Mass.: Christopher-Gordon, 1993), p. 116.


<sup>12</sup> Lynne Reid Banks, *The Indian in the Cupboard* (New York: Avon, 1980), p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale, *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children* (Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, 1998), p. 91.

<sup>14</sup> Donnarae MacCann, "Native Americans in Books for the Young." In *Teaching Multicultural Literature in Grades K-8*, Violet J. Harris, ed. (Norwood, Mass.: Christopher-Gordon, 1993), p. 145. See also John Stott, *Native Americans in Children's Literature* (Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryx, 1995), pp. 15-18.

<sup>15</sup> Slapin and Seale, *Through Indian Eyes*, p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> Reese, "Native Americans in Children's Literature," p. 161.

Parts of this article were presented at the conference "Color, Hair, and Bone: The Persistence of Race into the 21st Century," held at Bucknell University on September 27, 2002. Other parts are adapted from *Encountering Children's Literature: An Arts Approach* by Jane M. Gangi (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2004). For a comprehensive bibliography, inclusive of multicultural literature and authors and illustrators of color, see <http://faculty.sacredheart.edu/gangij>. 

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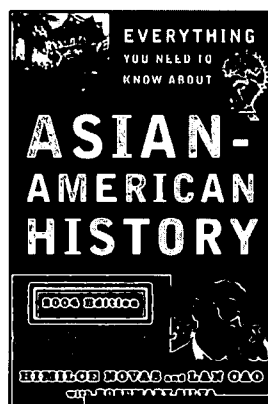
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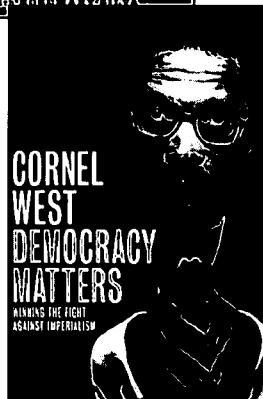
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